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Sunroc gets OK for mine at Veyo cone

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Sunroc gets OK for mine at Veyo cone

By ANGIE PARKINSON

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ST. GEORGE — Sunroc Corporation will be allowed to expand its mining operations at the base of the East Veyo Cone. The Washington County Commission provided the final link in a long chain of approvals for the project Monday during its regularly scheduled meeting. The commission voted unanimously to approve a conditional-use permit for the expansion of the project.

Veyo and Brookside area residents were not pleased with the decision and some say it does not mark the end of their battle to stop the mining at East Veyo cone.

Veyo Community Council member Monte Johnson said the residents would continue to fight.

"It is not over," Johnson said. "From the standpoint of the Veyo Community Council we are still in a position where we strongly oppose the BLM's position."

The Bureau of Land Management was the first to approve the project, then the Washington County Planning Commission and now the Washington County Commission.

Johnson questions not only the expansion of Sunroc's mining operations but also the legality of the existing community pit. Johnson presented the commission with excerpts from a 1978 Bureau of Land Management document that outlines the intended use for the inactive volcano cones along State Route 18.

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The document suggests mineral pits at the cones be closed except one. The document stipulates one community pit be established in an unobtrusive location on the East Veyo Cone. Johnson and BLM leaders disagree on whether the document intended to allow mining where the community pit exists today or in Sunroc's new location.

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None of that entered into the County Commission's decision, however.

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The commission cannot decide whether the existing pit is legal, said Deputy County Attorney Brock Belnap. That disagreement is between the BLM, area residents and possibly the court system.

County Commissioners made their decision under the assumption that the existing pit is legal.

Commissioner James Eardley was impressed by the tax benefit of allowing the additional mining and the fact that Sunroc promises to have fewer trucks on road than now. At peak times as many as 20 to 30 Sunroc trucks per day use SR-18 to haul cinders.

"Under this proposal that number would be reduced to two to three trucks per day. I don't know why anybody wouldn't see that that's a tenfold benefit," Eardley said.

In terms of the residents' concerns over dust and noise from mining the commissioners reminded residents at the meeting that Sunroc has to meet all environmental protection standards.

The permit was granted with the understanding that Sunroc would comply with several conditions set by the Washington County Planning Commission.

For instance, Sunroc must comply with a subset of conditions set by the BLM. They must have a designated water supply for the project. The cinders must be wet down regularly so as to comply with Environmental Protection Agency standards. The permit is only granted on a one-year basis with a review scheduled at six months. The cinder loads must be covered in tarp and the drilling must not be done any higher than 4,900 feet.

In addition Sunroc trucks can only haul cinders at

specific times. No Sunroc cinder trucks can use SR-18 during the hours of 7:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. or from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Those conditions are not strict enough for many Veyo and Brookside residents. They would prefer that the entire mine be shut down — Sunroc's area and the community pit. They are already planning a fund-raiser for legal fees they expect to use challenging the BLM. The fund-raiser is set for Nov. 10.

One resident, Larry Leisik, has already filed an appeal with the Department of Interior contesting the BLM's finding of "no significant impact" through their Environmental Assessment.

Sunroc officials vowed Monday to be responsible with the permit.

According to Sunroc President Rhys Weaver, allowing Sunroc to mine cinders at the pit benefits the entire area. If they can mine cinders economically people can build houses economically. If houses are built economically more people will move to the area.

"We hope that the residents of Veyo and all the community will be able to see the value of what we're trying to do here," Weaver said. "We at Sunroc certainly want to do all we can to operate in that pit in a way in a way that is concerned with their needs as well."

The Commission also approved a much smaller mining operation during their Monday meeting. That operation will be located approximately four and a half miles south of Grassy Meadows Sky Ranch in Hurricane. That mining operation was also vehemently opposed by area residents.

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